# A Recoiling Vengeance

by Frank Barrett

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# A RECOILING VENGEANCE

VOL. II.

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# RECOILING VENGEANCE

"Revenge at first, though sweet,
Bitter ere long, back on itself recoils."
MILTON

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF "HIS HELPMATE," "JOHN FORD,"
"THE GREAT HESPER," ETC.

*IN TWO VOLS.*

VOL. II.

LONDON
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# A RECOILING VENGEANCE.

## CHAPTER I.

### I TELL A STORY WITH A MORAL.

I SHOULD like to know what you would have done, seeing an honest man—so honest as to be devoid of suspicion—bamboozled and cheated by a lying, subtle rascal on the other side of a half-glazed door with a taffety blind. If you are an ordinary person, with an ordinary love of truth and an ordinary hatred of deceit,

I'll be bound you would have flung open that door and told simple Dr. Awdrey that Lynn Yeames was a liar and a cheat, and proclaimed all you knew about him and his motives; but if you are like me, a wily old lawyer, you would have done nothing of the kind. For Dr. Awdrey believed that my prejudice against Lynn Yeames amounted to a mania; I had no proof whatever to substantiate a charge against him, and in the absence of proof Dr. Awdrey would be fully justified in believing a trusted friend in preference to a biased lawyer. How could I prove that he knew nothing about the will before his mother telegraphed to him after the reading of it? I could only declare that he did not know, he could declare that he did. He had ingenuity to invent reasons as good for his knowing the fact as those I could produce to show that he was ignorant of the real truth. In a case of hard swearing the judge must lean towards the side which seems least capable of duplicity, and it would go hard with the lawyer in such a case.

These conditions decided me to leave the half-glazed door as it was, and to seek some more than ordinary means of discomfiting an extraordinary rascal.

I felt sure of this—that Dr. Awdrey would insist upon Lynn going at once and telling his story to his sweetheart; and it seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to go Flexmore House beforehand and prevent Mr. Lynn deceiving Miss Dalrymple as he had deceived Dr. Awdrey.

"Mrs. Guttridge," said I to my housekeeper, who is a careful woman, and delivers messages correctly "I can't wait any longer; I don't wish to disturb Dr. Awdrey and his friend, who seem to be having a nice little chat. If they ask for me you will say that I had an appointment to keep, but that I shall be at home from nine till twelve to-morrow morning."

With that I trotted off to Flexmore House as fast as my legs would carry me; but there was plenty of time to think on the way and I had plenty to think about.

How was I to warn Miss Dalrymple? To tell her bluntly that her lover was a scamp would not do Her love would only strengthen in defending him against his accuser. She had already given me proof of this.

But did she still love him? Had she ever really loved him? I was inclined to answer *no* to both

"'I CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER'"

questions. I believed that as yet she had really loved no one. Yet I was not sufficiently sure to feel that I could with safety speak openly on the subject. And that is why I made up a fairy story—I could never have told it without premeditation—as I trotted on; yes, a fairy story—a pretty occupation for a lawyer, you will say.

They saw me, Nurse Gertrude and little Laure, from the drawing-room window as I came up the gravel path, and the child darted off to open the door, and both welcomed me with smiles on the threshold.

"We've been hoping you would come, and expecting you all the afternoon," said Laure. "We want to know when we are to pack up, and what to pack."

"I'll tell you all about that as soon as I've warmed myself by the fire," said I. "And warm myself I must, for I'm as cold as the 'Lonely Duckling' in the fairy story."

You see I lost no time in leading up to my subject.

"You mean the 'Ugly Duckling'—I've read about it in Hans Andersen's——"

"No; I mean the 'Lonely Duckling,' not the 'Ugly Duckling,'" said I.

"I don't know that story. You shall tell it to me while you are warming yourself."

"So I will," said I, readily, for that was my purpose.

And after talking to Miss Dalrymple about the weather I took the arm-chair Laure had drawn in front of the fire, and rubbing my hands I pretended to be vastly comforted by the warmth—though, to tell the truth, I was not a bit cold after my quick trot.

Nurse Gertrude seated herself at the chimney side, and Laure nestled against her shoulder, and a very pretty group they made in the twilight, with the glow of the fire upon their faces and hands.

"Tell me about that lonely duckling now," said the child; "this is just the time for a story."

"Yes," said I, "there couldn't be a better time for it. Well, this duckling was a poor, miserable, half-fledged, helpless little thing, out alone on a common, and it kept standing on tiptoe, flapping its little wings and crying 'quack, quack,' in the most piteous manner possible, for she was very hungry and very cold. I must tell you it was a little duckling, and not a drakling, which accounts for her being particu-

"A VERY PRETTY GROUP THEY MADE."

larly helpless and miserable in these circumstances. But it was no use her standing on tiptoe, for it did not enable her to see farther than the end of her beak—ducklings being by nature short-sighted—and it was no use flapping her wings, for they were not strong enough to fly with, and there was no one near to hear her cry 'quack, quack,' and take pity on her. So she waddled on a little further until she ran smack up against a cocoanut, who was too intent upon business to get out of her way."

"What was the cocoanut doing?" asked Laure.

"Nothing; but he thought he was doing a good deal. That's the way with cocoanuts."

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the little duckling, humbly, 'I'm very cold and hungry; could you give me something to eat, and put me under your wing for the night?'

"Now, the cocoanut was not a bad sort of fellow, though he'd worked himself bald, and was terribly hard and dry outside. Some people thought he was like that all through, and there was nothing in him; but they were mistaken, for there was some milk inside him, and that was the milk of human kindness; so he replied—

" 'I'm very sorry, my dear, but I have moulted all my feathers, and I have so much business on hand that I can't spare time to look for food. However, if you go on a little further you'll find a sausage who'll help you, for he's full of goodness, great fat lumps of goodness, and he's very soft, and if he can't sit on you himself he will never rest till he's found some one who will.'

"Then the little duckling waddled on more hopefully than before till she ran against the sausage, who was standing on end dreaming with delight that he was frizzling in a frying-pan for somebody's benefit. He was ready to burst with goodness, and when he felt the duckling's beak strike him in the middle he thought it was the cook running a fork into him, and he spluttered in his sleep, 'Turn me over, and brown me on the other side.' With that he awoke, and, seeing the duckling, he pulled himself up straight in his skin and begged her to tell him if there was anything in the world he could do for her. The duckling told him what she wanted and the sausage gave a great sigh, because he felt he was too big for the duckling to swallow whole, and he hadn't the power to cut himself up in

bits, though he was ready to sacrifice himself for anybody."

"What a stupid old sausage he was," said Laure.

"That's what the cocoanut thought; but he was so hard that he couldn't be expected to sympathize greatly with anything soft. However, the sausage was of some use, for he called a guinea-hen, who was only a shade less soft than himself, and very warm under her feathers. She undertook to take care of the duckling at once, and soon scratched and picked up a supper for her, after which she tucked the little duckling under her wing and watched over it with open eyes all night. Then in the morning she plumed the little thing's feathers, and took her for a walk in the sun, which had such a beneficial effect on her that she looked quite a nice little creature, and the hen was as proud of her as if she had been her own chick. As for the little duckling, now that she was warm and dry and well cared for, she was quite content, and resolved she would never, never stray away from the kind guinea-hen."

"That is not all, is it?" cried Laure, at this juncture.

"Oh, dear no! We haven't come to the fox yet," said I.

"There was a fox then, eh? Oh, I don't like him."

"Nor do I. What is worse, there were two of them —an old vixen fox, and a young dog-fox." Miss Dalrymple looked into the fire gravely.

"It was the vixen who first found them out," I continued. "She was going over the downs one morning, as lean and hungry as could be, when she suddenly stopped and sniffed the air. 'I smell duckling,' said she; and then, creeping on a little further, she licked her skinny chops, and said, 'I smell guinea-fowl.' So she crawled on till she spied the two basking in the sun, as happy and unsuspecting as the old sausage hard by. But there stood the cocoanut, and the old vixen didn't like the look of him. She couldn't make him out at all, because cocoanuts are not often seen on the downs. So she slinked back to her hole, where the young dog-fox was yawning the top of his head off.

"'Don't do that, you'll disfigure your pretty face,' said the old vixen.

"'I've got nothing else to do,' said the young dog-fox.

"'I'll tell you what you can do,' said the old vixen. 'There's a guinea fowl and a young duckling on the downs; go and entice them home here, and we'll pick their bones together: there's a sausage also —you might bring him home too, though I don't know whether he's very digestible; but, whatever you do, be careful of that brown thing like an overgrown egg, for I'm half afraid he's a gin in disguise, or perhaps a new kind of fox-hound.' She alluded to the cocoanut. 'You'll have to be very careful and exceedingly cunning,' added the old vixen, in conclusion.

"The young dog-fox promised to be as sly as possible, and the vixen suffered him to go alone, for she had the greatest confidence in his ability as a fox. So off went the dog-fox, and when he came in sight of the guinea-hen, he put on the most innocent air in the world. He would have liked to pounce on the pair then and there, but he remembered what his mother had said about the new breed of fox-hound, and liked the look of the cocoanut no better than she did. Besides, he was not quite sure that the hen and duckling were real; they might only be put there as a bait to lure him into a trap.

'However,' thought he, 'if I can only get them away from this place, we'll soon see whether they're real or not by the cracking of their bones.' He took a roundabout way, and coming up to them, grinned from ear to ear as he said 'Good morning.'

"At the sight of his teeth the little duckling ran under the guinea-hen who bristled up her feathers, and looked as if she would call on the cocoanut for assistance.

"'Don't be alarmed,' said the dog-fox, blandly, 'my intentions are strictly honourable. I only came to have a little rational conversation. I know I'm a fox, but I assure you I'm not foxy. My exterior may be unprepossessing, but I'm only a fox superficially, indeed. I think of turning myself inside out to show that I'm more like a turtle dove than anything else. What do you find to eat here?'

"'Not ducklings,' retorted the guinea-hen, pointedly.

"'Well, I'm glad of that. I hate eating duckling, other foxes are partial to them: even my mother who is a kind-hearted old vixen, might eat duckling at a pinch. I own that in my early days, when I knew no better, I did nibble a little bit of one myself. But I've grown out of that, being only a

fox externally. I should like to live on barley and soaked bread, and stuff of that kind. One sees what a beneficial effect upon the mind such diet has. I quite believe that after I had got through a peck of barley and a quartern loaf, I should be quite a guinea-fowl.'

"'Do you, indeed?' said the guinea-hen, who was highly flattered by this compliment.

"'Oh, upon my word, I'm sure of it,' replied the dog-fox; 'ask my friend the sausage here what he thinks on the subject.'

"Now, the sausage, who would believe an addled egg to be good until it was broken, replied: 'I should be very sorry to say that a fox could not become a guinea-fowl if his heart is good; and if this gentleman says that his heart is good, it would be very wrong of us to treat him as if his heart were bad. His manner is certainly more fowl than fox.'

"'Oh; I should be a perfect fowl if I could only fly, and I've not the slightest doubt I could learn the art in a brace of shakes, if you would only give me a few lessons,' said the dog-fox, with the sweetest bow to the guinea-hen. The guinea-hen was more pleased than ever with this testimony to

her influence. She thought he must be good to say such nice things, especially as the sausage believed in him quite as much as she did.

"'Won't you come for a walk with me, and give me a lesson?' asked the dog-fox, seeing her smile, 'you can bring your little duckling with you.'"

"But she didn't go, did she?" asked Laure in turn.

"You'll see presently," said I. "The guinea-hen was much excited, but she was too prudent to go at once. However, she promised she would think it over, and let the dog-fox know next day. Whereupon, the dog-fox, not to alarm her by seeming too anxious, made a most polite bow, and went off, trying to look as much like a guinea-fowl as possible. Now he was just passing the cocoanut when he heard a voice say—

"'Mind the bones!'

"He looked round in surprise, and seeing nothing but the cocoanut, he said—

"'I beg your pardon, did you speak?'

"'Yes,' replied the cocoanut. 'Mind the bones don't stick in your throat and choke you.'

"'What bones?' asked the dog-fox, astonished.

"'The fish bones, to be sure,' said the cocoanut.

"'What fish bones?' asked the bewildered dog-fox.

"'Why, the bones of that sprat that the penny hen is sitting on,' replied the other.

"'Sprat! Penny hen!' exclaimed the dog-fox. 'Upon my word, I don't understand you.'

"'That's not surprising,' retorted the cocoanut; "for you're such a fool you've mistaken a sprat for a duckling and a penny hen for a guinea-hen. That's the way with you clever foxes, you're always getting into some trap or other.'

"Off went the dog-fox as fast as he could trot. On the road he encountered the old vixen. 'You're a clever old dear, you are!' he cried angrily, 'to send me after a guinea-hen and a duckling, when there's nothing there but a sprat and a penny hen.'

"And away he pelted to seek something more toothsome, and forget as quickly as possible all about poor guinea-hen who was flattering herself with all sorts of pleasant visions with regard to the dog-fox she might transform into a guinea-fowl."

"Ah, that was a good thing," said Laure, clapping her hands. "That was a nice old cocoanut—very clever too, I think, don't you?"

"Oh, I have the highest opinion of his ability," I replied.

"Well, as soon as the dog-fox was gone, the old vixen started off to see what all this meant; and it was not long before she discovered the real state of the case, for there was the guinea-hen looking a little anxious and disappointed to be sure, but a real guinea-hen for all that, and not a penny hen; and as for the duckling she was fatter and better-looking than ever. The only difference to be seen was in the condition of the sausage; he looked flabbier and paler than before, and I'll tell you how that came about. He was so anxious that the duckling should get fat, and that the guinea-hen should have no trouble to seek food for her, that he was shaking himself out of his skin that she might have plenty to eat."

"Oh, that stupid sausage—I've no patience with him!" said Laure.

"No, more have I, my dear," I said. "But it pleased the old vixen mightily, for she saw that there would be a better picking than ever on the duckling. So away she scampered with her nose well out, sniffing the air till she got the scent (and a very

nasty scent it was, too!) of master dog-fox, who was prowling round a yard in which there were dozens of fine fat geese.

"'Come away from there,' cried the old vixen, 'you are only wasting your time and losing an opportunity that does not often present itself. I'm surprised at you, a dog-fox, allowing yourself to be cheated by a cocoanut; but those foxes who are readiest to deceive others are only too prone to be themselves deceived. Go back and get that duckling before she's snapped up by some one else, and don't listen to anything the cocoanut may tell you about sprats and penny hens. If you doubt my word, ask the sausage, who is too much of a fool to deceive any one but himself.'

"Off went the dog-fox with his tail between his legs, for he was ashamed to think he had been overreached by a cocoanut.

"But at the same time he was not disposed to disregard that warning about the bones, for there was nothing he dreaded so much as being tricked himself. So you may be sure he went to the sausage first before inviting the guinea-hen to come with him a second time.

"'Good-morning, sausage,' said the dog-fox; 'you don't look quite yourself this morning.'

"'No,' replied the sausage; 'there's not much left of me but the skin. There's my head, to be sure—that's tied with a bit of string to my neck; but I've shaken out pretty well all the rest. I can feel that my heart is left inside; I'd shake that out, but I don't think any one would take the trouble to pick it up.'

"'Dear me, you were very plump when I last saw you,' said the dog-fox. 'What's become of all the nice lumps of fat?'

"'Oh, the duckling has picked them all up,' replied the sausage cheerfully, 'pretty darling, and she looks more like a Michaelmas goose than a duckling after it.'

"'You couldn't possibly mistake her for a sprat, could you?' asked the dog-fox slyly.

"The sausage would have laughed at the idea, but there was nothing left in him to laugh with; so he only shook his head seriously, and said—

"'No, she's not a fishy duck even, but just the tenderest, sweetest, juiciest——'

"The dog-fox couldn't wait to hear more, but bolted

off, slobbering at the mouth as he thought of the picking in store. However he wiped his jaws and put on a decent air when he caught sight of the guinea-hen and the duckling, and going up to them with a cheerful air, he said—'Good-morning, dears; I've come to take you for that walk we talked about the other day.'

"But the guinea-hen, although she was secretly very pleased to see him come back, drew herself up with dignity and asked why he had not kept his appointment and called the day before yesterday as he promised; whereupon the dog-fox told her first one fib and then another fib, and went on piling up fibs until at length the guinea-hen thought that surely there must be one genuine excuse amongst so many. And after all she did not dislike the dog-fox, and it was only her pride he had wounded by his neglect, and she was too kind-hearted to bear malice. 'Besides,' she said to herself, 'he's only a fox at present; but if I can only educate him into a guinea-fowl he will never offend again.'

"So she called the duckling to her side, gave her arm to the dog-fox, and went off with him to a place where he said she could teach him to fly. The

sausage blessed them as they went off, for he had achieved the object of his benevolent wishes, and feeling he could do no more shrivelled up. The dog-fox did not trouble himself to take his young friends home to the old vixen, but just gobbled up the little duckling on the way, and left not a scrap of her but a few feathers and a few bones."

"But that's not all," said Laure, as I came to a stop.

"That's all I know about the duckling."

"But the poor guinea-hen, what became of her?"

"Some say he gobbled her up also, others that he had no appetite for her after eating the duckling, and left her to break her heart."

"Oh, but a story shouldn't end like that."

"No; but stories will end like that when sausages and guinea-hens put faith in foxes who pretend they can turn themselves inside out."

"But the old cocoanut—why didn't he interfere?"

"I don't know; perhaps he was too busy—perhaps he feared his warning might be taken as an impertinence by the guinea-hen; what do you think, Miss Dalrymple?"

Miss Dalrymple had been looking gravely in the

fire during the course of my narrative—at least, whenever I glanced at her; but now she raised her eyes, and, looking me in the face, said with her calm air of self-possession—"He might have been silent because he thought her too foolish to profit by advice;" then she added, "If she were not wise enough to take care of herself it is very probable that she would be silly enough to regard a timely warning as an impertinence."

Just at that moment there was a sound on the hard path outside that attracted Laure's attention, and looking from the window she cried—"Oh, dear! oh, dear! Here comes that horrid Mr. Lynn Yeames."

"I dare say he has not come to see us, my dear," said I, "so we will go in the next room and see about the packing."

Nurse Gertrude rose from her chair and held out her hand to me, and as I pressed it in mine we looked fairly into each other's eyes, and I saw in the expression of hers that she was neither unwise nor ungrateful.

## CHAPTER II.

### MR. LYNN YEAMES PROVES HIMSELF BUT A SECOND-RATE DECEIVER.

I GATHERED up my hat, great coat, comforter, and stick, and tucking them under one arm and little Laure under the other, slipped into the adjoining room, where we shut ourselves in, just as Mr. Yeames was admitted to the drawing room by the other door.

I would have given anything to know what was taking place there; but I could not well put my ear to the keyhole in the presence of little Laure, so I had to content myself with the hope that the moral of my fable would enable Nurse Gertrude to see through the wiles of her crafty visitor, and give her strength to defeat them. It was exasperating to hear

the murmur of voices and not to distinguish what was being said; however I learnt later on from a certain source what took place in this interview, and I will set it down here as if I had seen and heard all—which, in my mind, I certainly did when the mere facts of the case were made known to me.

Standing by the door as he closed it, Lynn made a grave inclination of his head expressive of respect, contrition—anything you like; then he stepped forward hastily with his hand out, his head erect, his chest thrown forward, in a manly, honest way. She put her hand in his.

"Can you forgive me?" he asked, holding her hand, and speaking in that rapid, full undertone that is supposed to express earnest anxiety. "Gertrude!" he added, with a tender inflection, putting forth his left arm to take her by the waist.

Nothing succeeds like audacity with certain women; but Gertrude was not of that set, and, quietly shrinking to avoid his touch, she withdrew her hand and seated herself with the slightest deprecatory movement of her head. I can see that graceful, dignified movement as I write—a kind of "no-thank-you" movement.

With a deep sigh Lynn dropped his hands by his sides and sank into a chair.

"I ought to have spoken out at the very first, I know that," he said, in the tone of a man candidly admitting an amiable weakness. "I ought to have given you an explanation; but I was beside myself that morning."

"And as you have not offered any explanation since I am to suppose that you have been beside yourself rather over a week," said Miss Dalrymple, with sympathy in her voice.

The fellow had not the slightest sense of humour, and took her sarcasm seriously.

"Indeed I have," he said, with another sigh. He must surely have thought all women fools.

"Then I think a little apparent eccentricity of conduct must certainly be forgiven;" and so, as if she had dismissed the subject, she asked in a tone of ordinary civility, "And when did you return?"

"Oh, I—er—came back this morning," replied Mr. Lynn uncomfortably.

"You have seen your mamma, of course?"

"Yes; I had to take my traps home, you know, and get a tub after that beastly journey."

"To say nothing of giving your mamma some sort of explanation, she must have been very anxious about you."

"Yes; the mater seemed to be a bit worried and anxious."

"Dr. Awdrey has asked frequently after you. I suppose you have not had time to call upon him?"

"No—that is, yes; I spotted him coming along."

"How very fortunate. Mr. Keene has been inquiring about you. Of course you have not seen him?"

Not knowing how much she knew, he had to admit the fact that he had seen me also.

"Er—yes, I have; had to call upon him on a pressing matter of business, you know."

"Then, now I suppose you have satisfied nearly everybody's curiosity. Isn't it a great relief to you?"

The young man bent his head and looked on the ground. He couldn't stand chaff; but he had to make the best of it now—perhaps consoling himself with the reflection that he would not stand it after their marriage. I can imagine him promising himself to break her in and bring her to meek submission in

the future. Pity those poor souls who marry a bully they have teased beforehand!

"I think this is scarcely a time for badinage," said he, after a pause, still looking on the ground and tracing the pattern of the carpet with the lash of his whip. "I know I am not perfect; but you must admit that allowances should be made for a fellow under the influence of—of emotion."

"I am willing to admit that a man under that condition is not responsible for his actions—is that enough?"

"If you admit that, what am I to understand by your present attitude? You seem to forget what took place before I went away."

"But I do not. You made me an offer of marriage, but am I wrong in thinking that you made that under the influence of emotion? I absolve you from responsibility for action under that condition. May I not suppose that you were beside yourself when you made that proposal, and overlook the mistake as readily as that you have committed since?"

He was not quick enough for this sort of fencing, he only felt safe at a heavy cudgel kind of argument, and he fell back on it now.

"It was not a mistake, Gertrude—I loved you then as I love you now; I have come here this afternoon to ask you again if you will have me, faulty as I am—yet an honest fellow, thank heaven!—and be my wife?"

Nurse Gertrude was not greatly moved with this speech, which had very little appearance of depth and sincerity in it, despite the quavering of that manly voice, and a good deal of what he himself might have called "side."

"May I ask why you have thought it necessary to ask me a second time?" she asked, trying to fix his shifty eyes, and learn the truth from them.

"Well, your manner seems to imply that you consider the engagement broken off."

"I did think it broken off. Had I not reason to think so?"

"Oh, yes; the way I spoke to you and little Laure was unpardonable."

He paused, and looked down again to escape from her fathoming eyes. He had probably thought that there would be little difficulty in his way, and that he could just reconcile Gertrude, if she should resent his silence, with a few words and a kiss or two, and

without going into any more vexatious explanation than the mere avowal of manly weakness under trying circumstances. Dr. Awdrey had told him to confess the truth, and conceal nothing, adding that a woman would forgive the man she loves anything except duplicity. But Lynn, in his own conceited, pig-headed way, had fully relied on his own cleverness; his contempt for women in general disposed him to tell them no more than was necessary. He would rather have avoided an explanation, which, though it presented a certain attraction in being untruthful, would require a good deal of bolstering up to support his assumption of honesty and generosity. However he had bungled so disastrously in his own attempt, that he saw no escape from his dilemma but by acting now on Awdrey's suggestion.

"The fact is," said he, changing his tone with a slash at his leg, "I was purposely brutal to little Laure and you, I wished you to take offence and relieve me from the engagement."

"That is what I thought—it was the only construction I could put upon your behaviour," said she.

"I dare say you wonder what my reason was. I will tell you. I can't conceal the truth, and I know

well enough that there's nothing a loving woman will not forgive, except duplicity."

A new warmth glowed in Gertrude's heart. She liked those words; they were good and true—it never struck her that they might be Dr. Awdrey's.

"I knew that through Keene's delay I was ruined—that I had nothing whatever to expect from my uncle's will. I knew that I must no longer cherish the thought of making you my wife, in debt and penniless as I was, and—but there, you can imagine the rest."

"You wanted to give me the opportunity of breaking the engagement, before it might appear that our separation was due to mercenary considerations on my part. Oh, that was generous!" exclaimed Nurse Gertrude, carried away by her own impulsive and generous recognition of an unselfish, nay, a chivalrous motive on his part. All my warning was forgotten in an instant.

"I did not want to tell you this," he said, in a tone that seemed to disclaim any merit to gratitude.

"But you wronged me, Lynn," she said gently—"you wronged me, to think I might wish to break

the engagement because you were less rich than you expected to be when you made me an offer."

She held out her hand to him frankly, and he took it. If he had been wise enough to tell her all that had passed between him and Awdrey, she would have been his without doubt. In return for an open avowal, she would have swept aside my warning and all prudential considerations, put the best construction on his motives, and scorned to entertain any suspicion of mercenary motives which might be suggested by his conduct. Now was the time for him to spring up and put his arms around her; but he hung back, the dolt! With that perverse idea of a girl's mental inferiority, he thought he had told her enough. Possibly he was annoyed in being forced to abandon his own way of winning her, and act upon Awdrey's more generous and manly advice. Perhaps, believing that she was anxious to get him, he thought he might treat her with a little indifference as a kind of punishment for her previous coolness. There is no knowing the extent of pitiful meanness a heartless man is not capable of. Anyhow, he sat there in silence, waiting for her to make

a further advance. And that, giving her time for reflection, saved her.

"Are you greatly in debt, Lynn?" she asked, after a little consideration.

"Oh, not a great deal," he replied, carelessly; "a few hundreds."

"How many hundreds do you think?"

"Ten or a dozen," he said, with an unpleasant glance that seemed to say, "That's not your business."

But Miss Dalrymple evidently thought it was her business. How could she help an uneasy feeling stealing upon her, when the fool made no attempt to prevent it.

"And how do you propose to pay your debts?" she asked, not at all frightened by his forbidding look.

"That will be all right. The fellows won't press for payment. They know their only chance is to wait till I get a bit straight."

"How do you mean to get straight, as you call it?" she asked, smiling.

"Hang it all, Gertie," he exclaimed petulantly, "let's drop this subject. I came to make love to you, not to talk about money."

"Yes; but the two subjects seem to have become so involved that we can hardly mention one without talking about the other. The best way is to detach the pleasant from the unpleasant subject, and that would be most readily done by settling the money question at once—don't you think so?"

"Oh, well, if we must talk about that sort of thing, I should ask you to let me have a little money to square my accounts, while I look about for something that would enable me, in time, to pay you back—though I don't think there ought to be any debt or credit account between man and wife."

"Nor I," replied she gravely. "If I marry you, all that I have will be yours, and I should be very unhappy if I thought it necessary to question how you disposed of it. That is why we ought to settle the subject beforehand."

"That's all right. Of course, whatever I do with the money will be for our common good. So that settles the thing," he said, rising from his chair.

"Not altogether. To be quite explicit, I really do not think I can let you have ten or twelve hundred pounds. I am not certain how much I have, but I fear it is considerably less than that."

"There *is* no hurry, my dear child, none whatever!

said Lynn, approaching and laying his hand on her shoulder with the soothing and somewhat contemptuous manner he might have adopted towards a restive horse; "eight—ten months will be soon enough to settle my creditors' little bills. Ill manage them!"

"But in ten months I may be as far as ever from being able to let you have the sum you need; in the meantime you must be incurring fresh debts unless you have some definite means of earning money."

He looked at her questioningly, rather taken aback by this announcement.

"But you have heard of the arrangement Awdrey is going to make?" he said.

"Yes; Mr. Keene spoke to me about it yesterday—he told me he had full instructions to make terms with me respecting a perpetual engagement."

"You did not refuse his offer, did you?" asked Lynn, with a terrible suspicion that Miss Dalrymple might be Quixotic enough for such an act of abnegation.

"No; the terms were very generous, and I accepted."

"Then where's the difficulty? You surely don't think of living up to your income?"

"Perhaps not; but I don't think my economies

will amount to much more than fifty pounds by the end of the year."

He stepped back and sank into his seat, looking at her in speechless surprise. They were both under a misconception. She knew nothing about the two thousand a year Awdrey intended settling on her, and reckoned solely upon the one hundred I had agreed to pay; he knew nothing about the one hundred, and reckoned upon the two thousand. And the cool assertion that she should live pretty close up to that two thousand a year was enough to take his breath away. His look of astonishment perplexed Nurse Gertrude more than it amused her at the moment; for the gravity of the situation overpowered her perception of the ridiculous.

"I don't understand," he said at length; "do you really mean that you think of living at the rate of two thousand a year?"

"Certainly not. One hundred a year is what Mr. Keene agreed to pay me, and those are the terms I have accepted."

"But Awdrey told me that he intended settling the whole of the interest on the money left by Flexmore on you for taking the care of the child off his hands, and quite right that he should."

"I know nothing at all about that. Mr. Keene proposed a salary that I thought reasonable; if he had proposed more, I think I should have declined to accept it."

"I must have an explanation with Awdrey at once. There seems to be a little shuffling here. I must know the facts of the case."

"Mr. Keene is in the next room," suggested Miss Dalrymple.

Lynn replied with an expression in regard to me which it is unnecessary to repeat, for I think I have shown enough to prove that he was a blackguard, and quitted the room, to "go and have it out with Awdrey," in a manner so devoid of feeling, or even common courtsey, that it must at once have destroyed any faith in his sincerity that poor Gertrude cherished.

I have often asked myself since how it was that this young man so abruptly abandoned the course of hypocrisy he had hitherto followed so patiently and consistently—why he did not at least keep up a semblance of honesty until he was convinced that there was nothing to be got by it? I can only explain it by believing that he lacked the stamina which distinguishes a good from a second-rate player

at chess. Your second-rate player opens the game well, but in the critical finish, exalted by success into

"LYNN QUITTED THE ROOM TO 'GO AND HAVE IT OUT WITH AWDREY.'"

an undue appreciation of his own ability, or his adversary's inability, he abandons careful tactics, and

makes rash and reckless moves that inevitably lead to his own ruin.

Poor Gertrude! it was some time after the door closed upon Mr. Lynn Yeames before she came from the room where he left her, and then, despite the cheerful air she assumed, I perceived that she had been crying.

Here, again, I have wondered what she cried for. Had she not every reason to be pleased that she had found out the man's real character before marriage rather than after it? Was not scorn of such a base fellow enough to dry in its source the regretful tears that would have sprung in losing a lover? *I* should have thought so. But nothing puts on so many unlooked-for aspects as human nature. One cannot reason upon the movement of human hearts as if they were made of wheels, mathematically arranged, to produce from a given impulse a certain and undeviating result. So I say again, poor Gertrude! for she was weak as well as strong.

Had she really loved Lynn? or was she only interested in him from a belief that her influence had ennobled him? I cannot say; all I know is that she wept in realizing that he was neither noble nor lovable.

## CHAPTER III.

### DR. AWDREY PERSEVERES.

THERE is a wire-blind to the window of my office facing the street, so that as I sit at my table I can see what is going on out of doors. This is very convenient to a country lawyer who sees his clients pull up at his door, and is thus prepared to meet them. The morning after my last visit to Flexmore House I heard the crunching of wheels in

the ice of the gutter, and, glancing through the aforesaid blind, I caught sight of Dr. Awdrey. The old gig had been mended, and he had bought a new nag of the same sober sort as the last. "Ha, ha!" thought I, "he's come to settle about the two thousand a year that Nurse Gertrude is to receive."

It must be remembered that the particulars of the interview between Lynn Yeames and Miss Dalrymple, which I have set down in the last chapter, had not then come to my knowledge.

Dr. Awdrey came in clapping his hands, for, I remember, it was bitterly cold; and, pulling off one of his knitted gloves, he gave me his hand. His nose was red, but his fine kindly eyes sparkled brightly; and he had in his face that expression of virile energy, and vigour and triumph, which one may see in a man when he has broken the ice to take his morning plunge. But there are difficulties to overcome in carrying out a healthy, moral principle that call for just as much nerve and courage as diving through half an inch of ice; and it has often struck me that if a man braved as much personal inconvenience and discomfort in the service of humanity, as he will endure for the mere sake of self-glorification, it

would be infinitely better for himself and his fellow creatures. It was a moral plunge of this kind that animated and beautified the doctor's face that morning, I felt sure.

He sat down before the fire warming his hands and talking about the weather for some minutes; then, after a pause, he said—"Are there any farms to let about here, Keene, do you know?"

"Yes," said I; "you may take your pick of them for ten miles round."

"Is that a fact? Do you mean what you say?"

"Certainly. There's not a farmer who would not give up if he could find any one to take the land off his hands."

"How's that?"

"They're losing money."

"Why? Is the rent too high?"

"Land was never so cheap before. Rents have gone down fifty per cent."

"Then why don't farming pay?"

"I'll tell you," said I; "it's because your farmer is too genteel to work, and has to pay another for doing what he ought to do himself—that's one reason."

"If a man were not too genteel to work, if he put his heart and soul into it, if he went into it as a man goes into battle, staking his life on winning, how then?"

"He would make it pay—I'd stake my reputation on it!" I exclaimed. "You know nothing about farming, doctor; but with your dogged perseverance and a certain amount of intelligence that you would bring to bear on it, even you might make it pay; and I'll guarantee that you would make more by it than by your medical practice."

"I am very glad to hear you think so," said he cheerfully.

"Why? Do you think of taking a farm?" I asked hopefully.

He nodded. I was never better pleased in my life, and I told him so.

"It will make a new man of you," said I. "It will give you new life. You'll see that there's something better than physic—though I suppose if any one with the toothache sends for you in the middle of the night you'll turn out."

"I dare say I shall," he replied, with a twinkle in his eye that perplexed me.

However I was too pleased to think what was in his mind just then.

"Now, there's Thibald's farm," said I. "You could get that at fifteen shillings an acre, I know."

"Too far off. How about Captain Ranger's farm —do you think he wants to give up?"

"I know he does. He must. Can't go on losing eight hundred a year."

"Eight hundred a year! That's a good deal to lose," he said, drawing a long face.

"Why does he lose it? Because he never goes out of the house except to hunt or shoot; because he is lounging about his billiard-room instead of looking after his accounts when he's at home; because his wife keeps four servants; because he pays Evans three hundred a year for robbing him; and because he's no more a farmer than you are a lawyer. It's famous land—the best in the country. I'll get the place, house and all for you for a pound an acre. You're bound to make it pay; it's the very thing for you."

He smiled at my enthusiasm—a pleasant smile it was too.

"Besides," I went on, "look what a lot of good a

man like you could do there—half the vagabonds in Coneyford come from the squalid cottages on that estate—you would make them decent, and put the poor wretches in the way of living honestly and happily. That alone ought to tempt you, if I know you at all."

I saw it did tempt him. He looked in the fire meditatively, and it was easy to guess how his large heart and big mind were occupied. I continued to praise the farm and lay its advantages before him, for I had a strong motive in wishing him to take it. It adjoined the Dingle; from the windows of the farmhouse he would look over the pleasant meadows to Miss Dalrymple's cottage.

"Well," said he, rising, "I shall go over and look at the farm this afternoon perhaps. Do you know if Captain Ranger is at home?"

"He is, and will be only too glad to see you. I'll send a note up to him this morning. Leave all the negotiations to me. I shall manage that better than you could."

We shook hands and parted; but as soon as he was gone a misgiving seized me. That misgiving was verified in the afternoon when I caught sight of

him jogging along in the gig towards Captain Ranger's with Lynn Yeames on the seat beside him.

It was for Lynn, not for himself, he wanted the farm. I saw now why he had pitched upon that particular one; he also was aware that it was side by side with the Dingle. If anything could promote their union, it was this propinquity; for here, he must have reflected, the young man would be urged to do his best, that she might see he had the good qualities—the energy, the resolution which he pretended to, and she——but let me get on with my narrative.

In the evening I went over to the doctor's house to see if I could pick up any news, and by a happy chance he was at home. He welcomed me heartily, gave me a cigar—a good one, you may be sure—and when he had lit his own, he said—"I have seen the captain's farm. It will do admirably. I will get you to arrange terms with him as early as possible."

I nodded gloomily. My want of enthusiasm now, contrasting with my warmth in the morning, was too noticeable to escape him. Like all good fellows, he was keenly alive to the humorous aspect of

things, and I saw that twinkle in his eye again as he turned to poke the fire.

"I suppose there will be no difficulty about the money," he said.

"No," I replied, with a grunt.

"When do you think he will turn out—the earliest date?"

"March 24th"

"Not before?"

"No," I said; "and a good job too," I added, speaking to myself.

"You don't seem so eager about it as you were, Keene," he said, with a smile.

"No; I was idiot enough to think you were going to take it for yourself."

"And you have found out that the future tenant is to be——"

"Lynn Yeames? It's too good for him," said I, angrily.

"We shall see."

"Yes, we shall see him lose money—that's a comfort."

"He can't lose more than eight hundred a year."

"I'm not so sure about that. Who's to pay his losses?"

"I am."

"I thought so," I growled.

"I see no better way of executing Flexmore's wishes. If you were not so terribly prejudiced, I would look to you for help in the matter."

Nothing annoys me so much as to be accused of prejudice. It's bad enough to be told of the faults one has; but to be fathered with the very vice you pride yourself on being free from is exasperating. I dashed my cigar in the fire, and half turned my back on the doctor.

"I'm not clever at this kind of thing—I'm clumsy," said he, taking no notice of my irritation. "I feel the need of counsel."

"Well, let me hear what you've got to say," said I, turning round, with a resolve to be as impartial in my dealings with Yeames as if he were unknown to me.

"I have no right to any of this money virtually," he said.

"I won't admit that, to begin with," I replied. "He willed the money to you, and signed his will

when he was in health, and had the ability to reason the matter out: the will he did not sign was decided upon when he was sick and unable to reason upon it."

"You will admit that in either case he intended this money to go to the man Miss Dalrymple should marry?" I assented to this proposition, and he continued: "It is no longer a question whether I shall marry her—that is settled for ever."

"But it is a question whether Lynn will marry her, and that is not settled for ever."

"They will marry," he said, emphatically; "the only thing that separates them is this miserable question of money. I thought it might be arranged by giving the money to Miss Dalrymple; but, from what she said yesterday to Lynn, it is doubtful if she will accept it."

"I don't believe she will accept it, and come to that I don't see why she should. Her feelings are just as fine as yours, and she has no more right to the money than—according to your own notions—you have."

"That is the mistake I made, and it has increased the difficulty. Lynn frankly admits that he has be-

haved badly to Miss Dalrymple under the irritation of this wretched money question, and declares that he can never dare to stand in her presence until he has redeemed his character."

I was heartily glad to hear this, and I said so.

"It struck me in the night," he continued, "that Lynn, with his love of the country, his physical strength and vigour, could do something with a farm. I feel sure that he only needs occupation to develop his better qualities, and make a capital good fellow of him. It would steady him, Keene; he has told me over and over again that he needs an object in life to strive for. We all must have that, or live a trivial and contemptible existence. And striving to attain that object will just give him the steadfastness of character which he seems to lack at present—and no wonder. As you pointed out this morning, there are lots of capabilities for an earnest and sharp fellow in the captain's farm, and I sincerely believe that as he works on he will rise in his own esteem, until he feels that he may once more address himself to Miss Dalrymple. And do you think she will refuse him when she sees how he has strengthened

his character by working heart and soul for her sake?"

"Well, if he will only work heart and soul for his own sake, it's as much as I can expect of him," said I. "Let him begin with that; we shall see about the rest. You have spoken to him on this subject?"

"Yes: we went together to look at the farm this afternoon. He is delighted with it, is confident of success, and eager to begin."

I was not surprised to hear this. Every one thinks he has the wit to make a farm pay by just riding about on a cob and giving orders; and to be a "gentleman farmer" is the desire of a good many lazy young gentlemen—especially when there's good shooting in the neighbourhood, and a comfortable house, with an excellent billiard-table in it.

"Is he sufficiently confident in himself to work it on his own responsibility, or will he work it at your risk?" I added.

"Oh, of course I shall take the risk—he has no money—he is in debt indeed."

"You did not promise any given sum?"

"No; I left that to be arranged with you. That

is the subject on which I want advice. I did not wish to make a second muddle."

I smiled at the possibility of Lynn refusing the money if it had been offered him, but said nothing. It was a difficult question how to dispose of the money in dealing with a rascal on the one hand, and two people with such particularly sensitive and fine feelings on the other; however, after turning it over in my mind for some minutes, I began to see my way to a safe arrangement.

"If you are still resolved on parting with your money, I think I see how it may be done without too much risk," said I. "We will start with the idea that when Flexmore House is sold, the Dingle cottage paid for, and everything squared up, you have two thousand a year to dispose of for nine years from this date. Half of that must be put away as a reserve fund. Out of the other half you must pay Miss Dalrymple's salary and the expenses of Laure and the cottage—say, roughly, four hundred a year. That leaves six hundred to meet the losses on the farm and pay interest on the capital invested on going in. If Yeames makes farming pay, so much the better for him; he can pocket the profit, and

the six hundred can be added to the reserve fund."

"And what is to be done with the reserve fund?"

"I'm coming to that. At the end of nine years, when Miss Dalrymple ceases to be Laure's guardian, the reserve sum shall be drawn out and paid over in a lump to Miss Dalrymple if she is single (whether she likes it or not—she will be older and wiser then, I dare say), or to her husband if she is married. Here is an inducement for Yeames to develop his fine qualities, to work hard and win Miss Dalrymple, for then he will come in for the whole amount arising from the bequest. Now, there's an arrangement advantageous enough for Yeames in all conscience. It does not benefit you one penny piece, and so ought to be acceptable to you; and it carries out Flexmore's last wishes to a tittle."

"That seems a capital arrangement," said Awdrey cheerfully. "I should think Yeames would be pleased with it."

"He ought to be," said I. But I was very doubtful whether he would be; for a greedy man will not be satisfied with ten thousand a year, if he thinks he may by hook or by crook get twenty.

However, he had the grace to express entire satisfaction with the arrangement when Awdrey explained it to him, and the doctor bade me conclude negotiations with Captain Ranger as quickly as possible.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A SPOKE IN MR. YEAMES'S WHEEL.

THE following week Miss Dalrymple moved into her new home with all her household ; and one morning, when I had been to settle affairs with Captain Ranger, I walked across the meadow, climbed over the fence that separated them from the Dingle paddock, and made my way up to the cottage. I found everything in its place, and the whole house as neat and comfortable as if the tenants had been there a year.

It seemed to me that I had never seen Nurse Gertrude to such advantage. Black was certainly becoming to her, and her dress was, to my eyes, the perfection of grace and elegance, giving fulness to her figure which, as I have said before, was, in my opinion, a trifle too slight. Her carriage was never

wanting in dignity, but I thought she bore herself with the air of one conscious of being mistress of the house. Yet there was no stiffness or formality

"I CLIMBED OVER THE FENCE THAT SEPARATED THEM FROM THE DINGLE PADDOCK."

in her manner, little Laure herself didn't welcome me with sweeter smiles.

Bright fires were burning, and a cat and a dog

shared the hearthrug amicably; the sun streamed through on to the new carpet, there were flowers and berries here and there, an open work table, besides many signs of modern taste and refinement, which, though rather out of keeping with an old-fashioned bachelor's notions, nevertheless impressed me favourably. We old ones have had our day, and the young must have theirs; and though we cling to the things of our youth we must submit to their being pushed aside, for every change is in the direction of the higher and better, though we may fail to see it.

"Yes," said I, looking about me, "everything is bright and charming. It is prettier than the old house. That was comfortable for old folks, but this is in harmony with your young faces."

Then I sat down by the fire, and we fell to talking about the neighbours. I learnt that they had already received visitors, though it was scarcely time to expect them, and was glad to hear this, not only because it would be good for Laure to find companions of her own age, but for Miss Dalrymple's sake also. Mixing among people who must appreciate her excellent qualities, it was ten to one that some decent young fellow would fall in love with her, and good might

come of it. One thing I had made up my mind upon: if Dr. Awdrey wouldn't have her, Mr. Lynn Yeames shouldn't. Although the running at present looked favourable for Lynn, the race was not won yet by many a length, and I had a strong belief that he would be found nowhere when the marriage bell rang.

"And who else has called upon you, Miss Dalrymple?" I asked, when Laure left the room. "Has Mr. Yeames paid you another visit since we last met?"

I wondered whether the little frown with which she replied in the negative implied that she was hurt by his neglect, or vexed at the thought of his calling upon her again.

"I was told that he intends to redeem his character before he again presents himself," said I.

"I am very glad to hear it," she replied, taking up her work.

"However, you will be able to see him, for he is to be a near neighbour." I fancied that she did not look particularly pleased at this intimation. "He is going to live in the house over there, and from this window you will be able to see him, if you get

up early, mowing his fields, following his team, throwing heart and soul and money into the noble endeavour to become a worthy member of society and a model farmer."

She laid her work in her lap, and, looking at me incredulously, said—"But I understood that Mr. Yeames was in difficulties."

"What does that matter? He has found a friend who's a bigger fool than he in some respects, willing to pay his debts, and spend a thousand a year besides to make a worthy gentleman of him. Do you think he will succeed?"

She did not reply to my question, but sat absorbed in thought. Watching her face keenly, I thought there was an expression of tender sadness in it. Was she mourning in her heart for the face of one whom no effort could raise up? Or was she grieving to think of that friend's disappointment when he should find that all he had done was of no avail?

"The friend is Dr. Awdrey?" said Miss Dalrymple, after we had sat in silence for some moments.

"Yes," I replied; "that is not difficult to discover, for I believe there's not another man in the whole

world who would beggar himself for others as he will."

She sat with idle hands and musing eyes still and silent, as one sits at times awed by the beauty of a starry night.

"And I have not told you all that he will do to make Yeames a gentleman—he will give him two thousand a year when he wins you. If that does not encourage him to make himself a fit subject for matrimony, I don't know what will."

"He must have a great respect for Mr. Yeames," she said.

"A very strong belief in his latent goodness undoubtedly," I said.

"Yet he has not seen a great deal of him," she objected.

"I should think that the less one knows of Mr. Yeames, the higher one would esteem him."

"Yet Dr. Awdrey must have seen as much of him as you have, Mr. Keene," she replied, with a malicious twinkle; for she too shared the common notion that I am a man subject to prejudice, despite her ordinary good sense.

"Dr. Awdrey is not a lawyer," I retorted; "and

let me say this in his defence, he is as simple and confiding as a girl. In that category he is not the only one who has had a great respect for Mr. Yeames."

"How am I to reply to that thrust?" she asked, with a smile.

"By telling me that if Dr. Awdrey had as intimate an acquaintance with Mr. Yeames as you have his respect would have evaporated."

"But still his faith in latent good qualities might exist," said she.

"I know his love would remain unaltered; and while he thinks Yeames capable of goodness, and you capable of loving him, he will endeavour to bring about your marriage."

"His love?" she repeated, questioningly, with a little emphasis.

"His love," I said again; "'and greater love hath no man than this—that he lay down his life for his friend.'"

"Do you think he loves Mr. Yeames to such an extent as that?"

"I was not thinking of Mr. Yeames," said I; "he is not the only friend concerned: it is a friend better

known, more highly prized in his heart, for whom that brave man would lay down his life."

The malicious smile provoked by our little passage of arms faded from her lips, the colour left her cheek, her dark eyes deepened as she looked at me with intense earnestness, to read in my face what I had yet left untold.

I believe she realized at that moment for the first time that Dr. Awdrey loved her with a love that is deeper than friendship.

"If I have not put a considerably long spoke in Mr. Lynn's wheel, I'm a Dutchman," said I to myself, as I went away from Dingle Cottage.

## CHAPTER V.

### FIRST CHARGE AGAINST DR. AWDREY.

AS time went on however my faith in that spoke diminished.

Lynn Yeames had the sagacity to leave Coneyford, and keep out of sight, knowing that he could do nothing to re-establish his character until he should be in the farm where he was to work such wonders, or finding the bad weather that succeeded the frost intolerable, or society dull, or for some other reason that may be clearer later on.

I have said that he had made himself very popular at Coneyford with his charities, his reckless riding, his agreeable manners (to those he liked, or those he wished to like him) and his assumption of bluff, outspoken honesty. People were inclined to think

even better of him in his absence than when he was amongst them, remembering the pleasant side of his character, and forgetting the little slips which occasionally may have awakened suspicion. He was spoken of as a fine type of muscular Christianity. Miss Dalrymple was constantly with these people, and as it was generally understood that a tacit engagement existed between her and Yeames, they thought to please her by talking about him, and sounding his praises. Then that dear, stupid old doctor, whenever he got a letter from Lynn, must needs show it to her and dilate on the fine prospect extending before a young fellow with such manly feeling and high aim.

I was at Dingle Cottage several times when he called, and it seemed to me he only came there to talk about Lynn, or discuss the things he might do when he took possession of Captain Ranger's farm—evidently seeking to interest her in the improvements that might be made on the estate with a view to her sharing in Lynn's occupation when they should be near neighbours. Miss Dalrymple could not listen to all these direct or indirect praises of Lynn without being influenced in his favour. But how could I undo the mischief? What was the good of my firing shot

after shot at a wary enemy who kept just out of range? No one supported me—not a soul! I stood there alone in my dislike and mistrust. People laughed in my face if I said anything against him, and behind my back said I was a spiteful, venomous, rancorous, prejudiced old man; I know they did.

It seemed to me that all the world was mad; the only evidence of sanity that I could discover was a dawning appreciation of Dr. Awdrey's merit.

You may be sure that I did not hide his light under a bushel: I let every one know the disposition he was making of the money that was legally his. People signified that it was no more than right, considering that it was by the merest accident (culpable delay on my part, some hinted) that the second will giving the trust money to Yeames was not signed; but they admitted that Awdrey had behaved well in the matter. His professional services were called for by several of the good families, and indeed it looked as if his luck were turning at last, and he might before long get a decent living out of his practice.

But this did not reconcile me to the course of events. A few hundreds a year more or less could

make no difference to his happiness; but the impending blow that threatened to shatter his peace of mind for ever looked day by day more likely to fall. Lynn would undoubtedly work well at his farm at the beginning—the very novelty and romance of the thing would please him; and then, with everybody holding up hands in wonder and astonishment at his prodigious virtue and "manliness," what was to save poor Miss Dalrymple from falling into the trap and marrying him? What avail would be my single protest, now become a subject of public ridicule? Nothing. They would marry: in six months he would tire of her and farming; in nine months he would neglect her; in a year she would break her heart, and the doctor would be the most miserable man on the face of the earth.

It was the end of the second week in March, and people were speculating on the day when Lynn Yeames would make his appearance—for he was to take possession of the farm on quarter day—when something occurred which upset everything—nothing less than a moral cataclysm altering the entire aspect of affairs.

Coming home that particular afternoon I found

a visitor in my office who had been waiting there three parts of an hour to see me.

He was a little pudgy man, with a short throat, a puffy face, and eyes as like a pig's as ever I saw. He breathed with difficulty, and gasped before each sentence, and in the middle also if it was a long one. He had not much hair; what there was of it had a dirty, sandy tint; his whiskers were hardly distinguishable, they were so thinly planted, and so like his complexion. He was dressed in a tightly-buttoned frock coat that formed deep ridges in his waist, and seemed to increase the difficulty of breathing. In one hand he held his hat, in the other a pair of gloves, and both rested on his knees, which, by reason of their shortness and pudginess, were widely separated.

"Afternoon, Mr. Keene; afternoon, sir," he gasped, turning his little blue eyes in the corner before he could screw himself up on his legs to face me. "Come to talk with you on a matter of business. My name's Bax—Smithson Bax;" with this he sank down on his chair and gasped again.

"Not the pleasure of knowing you, Mr. Bax," said I, sitting down in front of him.

"Thought you might have heard of me from Lynn Yeames, or (gasp) mother, Mrs. Yeames. I am —friend of the family."

"A professional friend?" I asked, for I detected the look of a pettifogger in him.

"You may call me—professional friend if you like —not a lawyer exactly—know something about it." He gave me a glance that was not to be mistaken, and continued: "To begin with, you must understand that I—acting on behalf of the family—Lynn Yeames nothing at all to do with it—better keep out of it."

"He does not wish to take the responsibility of anything you do?"

"That's it. Too generous—too careless of his own interests—altogether too—" he gasped, and filled up the break with a wave of his gloves.

"I understand his character perfectly, Mr. Bax; let us come to the point."

"We'll go straight at it—begin in the middle—save breath. Dr. Awdrey is a scoundrel!"

Lawyer as I am, this fairly took me back.

"Dr. Awdrey," he continued, "is nothing more nor less"——here a gasp and a short wave of his

hat over his knee to fill up the break—"biggest hypocrite, scoundrel, and rascal that ever imposed —credulous humanity!"

"Be good enough to show me how you arrive at this conclusion," said I.

"Here goes! Flexmore's will. He knew of the conditions in the first one?"

"He did."

"He knew also the conditions in the second?"

"He did."

"He knew that if that were not signed, he would come into two thousand a year?"

"He did."

"Good. Tell—please, Mr. Keene, why that second will was not signed?"

"I failed to deliver it in time," said I. He nodded.

"Why did you fail—deliver in time?"

"I was thrown out of a trap: that and the fog——"

He waved his gloves interrupting me, and, with a look intended to pierce, gasped—"Thrown out of trap! How? Answer me that, if you please!"

"By a rope stretched from one side of the road to the other."

"Good. I can produce a witness to prove that he was engaged by Dr. Awdrey to stretch that rope and throw you over!"

With that he dashed his gloves inside his hat, planted his open hand on his knee, bunched up his thick lips, and looked at me out of his little blue eyes, as much as to say, "There you are; what do you think of that?"

To tell the truth, I felt as if the floor had suddenly sunk away from under my feet: but I was too old to let it be seen, and said as calmly as I could—"Well, sir, go on. You have not come here simply to make that statement, I presume."

"That's one charge; but mark me!" he said, pausing to put his finger to the side of his fat nose, where he kept it as he continued—"Mark me! it isn't the only one—more than one witness to be produced. There's another charge—charge more serious than stretching rope cross road—upsetting you."

"And pray what charge is that, Mr. Bax?" I asked, with pretended indifference.

"A criminal charge. We reserve it—respect for Mr. Lynn Yeames' feelings."

"A charge of this kind is likely to do him more injury than any one else," said I.

"Quite right to take the high horse Mr. Keene. We know all about that;" he closed one of his little eyes, and looked exceedingly deep as he said this. "However, here's the fact—we can throw will into chancery, and ruin Dr. Awdrey, if we make facts public. Lynn Yeames does not wish to proceed. Mrs. Yeames does. So do I. To meet Lynn's wishes we will abandon proceedings"—once more he laid his stubby finger on his stubby nose—"*on condition.*"

"Tell me straight out what you mean by that," I said.

"I mean—our side abandons proceedings—written guarantee and all that sort of thing; you on your side pay over interest on money left in trust for Miss Flexmore. Awdrey professes he has no right to money—give it up to Lynn, who has. Loses nothing—avoids scandal—saves reputation. There you are."

"Have you anything more to add to this proposition?" I asked.

"Nothing, except this—stay proceedings for a week—time for you to arrange with Awdrey, and give us decision. One week from to-day—you understand?"

"Perfectly well; there is no necessity to keep you waiting a week for a decision; you shall have it at once. On behalf of my client and myself, I refuse to have anything more to say to you. Let me say in conclusion, you confounded, pettifogging rascal," said I, rising and giving free vent to my anger, "that if you could prove your criminal charge against Dr. Awdrey, I am the last person in the world who would compound a felony, but the first who would take measures to punish the man who did. Get out of my house!"

He got up on his little legs, gasping and stammering, dropped his gloves out of his hat, got purple in the face in picking them up, gasped and stammered again; but quickly made his way through the open door with his small blue eyes in the corner, for all the world like a pig bolting past a driver. Mrs. Lynn's description of me, or her son's, for I had no faith in his standing out, had evidently been not flattering, and he had thought to find in me a shuffling scoundrel of his own kidney.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WHICH IS THE JUDAS?

THIS event gave me no little anxiety at first, but it wore off when I came to consider it calmly. I could not believe in the man's statement respecting a criminal charge in reserve. It was not likely he would keep back the stronger inducement in leading to a compromise. As for his witness to prove that Awdrey had been instrumental to my delay, that was nothing; he could get as many witnesses of that kind as he chose at a pound a head. No: it seemed to me nothing but a mere attempt at extortion, got up, probably, by Yeames, his mother, and Bax, who thought, very likely, that I should be rascal enough to stand in with them. It was easily understandable that Mr. Lynn Yeames would prefer the money all in his own hands in preference to

taking a possible six hundred a year out of it, with a not too probable addition should he succeed in marrying Miss Dalrymple. But he was not fool enough to put all his eggs in one basket, he was cunning enough to disclaim any hand in the conspiracy, in order to profit by Awdrey's generosity, should the attempt fail. But only think what a heartless, thankless, worthless vagabond he must have been to join in a plot against the man who was sacrificing everything to make him happy.

I flattered myself that I had shown Bax the folly of his "proceedings," and that I should neither see nor hear any more of him or his criminal charges. And this belief was strengthened when two days later Lynn Yeames appeared in Coneyford, and his mother returned to her cottage.

He went the very morning of his arrival to Dr. Awdrey, and in the afternoon I saw them going along the High Street together, Lynn with his arm linked in Awdrey's. They were going towards the farm to see the alterations and improvements that had occurred to the doctor in the other's absence. I felt sure then that the intimidation scheme was abandoned.

I had said nothing about it to Awdrey, knowing

"I SAW THEM GOING ALONG THE HIGH STREET TOGETHER."

that he would take it only as another evidence of Lynn's loyalty that he did not share in his mother's virulence.

But the next day I was alarmed to hear that Bax was staying with Mrs. Yeames!

I began then to fear that all was not so well as I had imagined, but it perplexed me to decide what his next move was to be.

It was evident that Lynn was silent about Bax and his mother; every day he was to be seen with Dr. Awdrey, who showed no sign of discomfort. Nothing occurred for several days; but on Friday, the 20th March, Miss Dalrymple called upon me. She was as pale as a ghost. Her hand trembled in mine.

"Oh, Mr. Keene!" she exclaimed, "what is the meaning of these rumours?"

"Sit down, my dear," said I, guessing what she meant. "Sit down; now tell me what it is you have heard."

She was greatly agitated.

"I don't know how to tell you," she said, hurriedly; "it is so impossible—so dreadful."

"Tell me the worst. Don't hurry. Now then what is it?"

"They say that Dr. Awdrey prevented you from arriving at the house in time for Mr. Flexmore to sign his will. A man has confessed to being employed by him."

"I have heard something about that. Have you heard anything else?"

"Oh, yes, yes! They say that the medicine he gave me to adminster to Mr. Flexmore was"——she hesitated a moment, and dropping her voice so that it was scarcely audible, said—"poisoned!"

I started. This then was the criminal charge Bax had hinted at.

"Who told you this?" I asked, when I had overcome the first dash of astonishment.

"Mrs. Caseby came to tell me. She thought I ought to know."

There never was a bad piece of news that some kind friend did not feel she ought to let you know it.

"Everybody is talking about it, she says. What can be done?"

"My dear," said I, "no one can attach any blame to you in the matter."

"Oh, I am not thinking about myself!" she

exclaimed, "but poor Dr. Awdrey. Of course it is untrue: but how is he to disprove it?"

"By taking no notice of it. That is the course I should advise."

She shook her head.

"It is not enough to treat such a charge with contempt," said she. "It must be made quite clear that he is innocent. People are against him; they must be made to see that they wrong him."

"He will not see the necessity," said I. "No doubt every one is against him. They will say that his endeavour to make Lynn Yeames a decent member of society was simply a blind—a means of making a friend of the man he fears—a bribe to stay him from making a claim that he can never establish——"

"They *do* say that. Mrs. Caseby herself urged the very same argument."

"No doubt; and her opinion will be shared by all the rest of our small society. They will signify that he can send in his bill and discontinue his attendance—these people who have just begun to take him up."

"They have. The Langdons, Heatherleys—all who were loud in his praise yesterday are against him to-day. All, all!" she said, clasping her hands.

"Good," said I; "and Dr. Awdrey won't care that (snapping my finger) for them or their opinion. He has too much pride to accept so mean a challenge. He has done without these fine folks, and he can do without them. Conscious of his own innocence, he will see no necessity to study the opinions of people who doubt him; and, to tell you the truth, I see no necessity either."

"But I do," she said, with a vigour that impressed and pleased me at the same time.

"Will you tell me why?" I asked.

She looked me straight in the face without blenching, and replied—"Yes. Because with public opinion against him——" she paused an instant, and then with yet greater firmness pursued—"he will never ask me to be his wife."

I caught hold of her hand and kissed it; I should have done the same thing had she been queen or beggar maid, for a nature like that commands homage.

"That's enough, you dear, good, clear-sighted young woman," said I. "Awdrey's innocence shall be proved as sure as I am a lawyer."

"I CAUGHT HOLD OF HER HAND AND KISSED IT."

The colour had mounted now into her face, she bent her head, she moved her lips as if to speak, then checked herself. I interpreted these signs of girlish modesty.

"I know what is in your mind," said I. "You do not wish Awdrey to know what you have told me. Be under no apprehension: a lawyer knows how to keep a secret when it suits him. Leave the matter in my hands, and by to-morrow morning you shall have news of some kind—good news I feel pretty sure."

I lost no time in seeing Dr. Awdrey; on my way to his house I settled how to act.

"Well, Awdrey," said I when we met, "how is the world using you?"

"Pretty much the same as usual—only more so," he said with a laugh; and then in a tone of perplexity he continued—"I can't quite make it out—I have received three letters to-day asking for my account, and all three have employed me only about a month. I suppose it's a polite way of telling me that I am not wanted any more."

"That's it," said I; "and the reason is that you are accused of throwing me out of a gig, and poisoning poor old Flexmore."

"What!" he exclaimed, knitting his brows in astonishment.

"It's a fact. The rumour is circulating. You'll have none but your paupers to doctor at the end of the week."

"I'm glad of it," said he, "if the rest will listen to such nonsense as that."

"We shall have to take measures to disprove the charge, doctor," said I.

He laughed boisterously.

"Not I," said he—"not though all the world believes this."

"Yes you will, my dear fellow," I said quietly. "All the world believes you poisoned the drug Miss Dalrymple had to administer."

"That's another thing," said he, with sudden earnestness. "You must take the necessary steps at once for having an autopsy."

"A *post-mortem* examination: that will settle the question at once."

"Then don't lose any time about it," said he. 'Poor Nurse Gertrude!" he added tenderly, thinking doubtless of the affront he had received being offered to her. Then in a tone of vexa-

tion he asked: "How long have you known this, Keene?"

"I heard something about it more than a week ago."

"Why didn't you tell me at once?"

"Because I thought it merely a scheme to extort money. A man named Bax spoke about it. Have you heard the name?"

"No. Who is he?"

"A rascal who made the modest demand for two thousand a year to hush up the matter. You have not heard his name?"

"No—how should I?"

"Through Lynn Yeames. Bax tells me he is a friend of the family."

"Lynn is no friend of his, I am certain," said the doctor stoutly.

"Well, Bax is acting with the mother, and has been staying at the cottage with the pair of 'em. How's that?"

"I will go and see Lynn at once. I am sure he is not party to this plot."

And he went off at once to find Lynn. And not long afterwards I caught sight of the pair in the High

Street, Lynn with his arm linked in the doctor's, and a look in his face that seemed to bid people observe that he still believed in Awdrey's innocence.

While I was looking after them, a colleague clapped me on the shoulder, and said in a low voice, nodding towards the two—

"Which is the Judas?"

"There can be no doubt about that," I replied, "unless Judas be too good a name for Lynn Yeames."

"I am not so sure about that, Keene. I don't like Awdrey's quiet, long-suffering, martyrish manner. He's a clever man—ten times cleverer than Yeames—clever enough to make a big venture. If I had to judge without evidence, I should acquit Yeames and hang Awdrey. And I believe if you would only clear your mind of prejudice——"

I would not wait to hear more of such fustian. I had no patience.

In due course I made a formal application for the *post-mortem* examination of Flexmore's remains. To my astonishment I learnt that the inquiry had been already demanded and accorded: the examination was to be made at once.

"Lynn assures me, and I believe him," said Dr. Awdrey when we next met, "that he has been opposed to his mother's action from the very beginning. He could not with any delicacy tell me of her proceedings. He himself insisted on Bax quitting his mother's house."

I have no time or patience to dwell on these trifles: I must at once come to the fact that utterly unmanned me when I heard it.

The examination resulted in this: enough arsenic was found in Flexmore's body to have killed a dozen men!

## CHAPTER VII.

### GETTING EVIDENCE.

THE news spread like a plague: within twenty-four hours every one had it, man, woman, and child, without distinction of rank or station. Every one went about open-mouthed to find some one to give the news to. A dozen persons said to me—"Have you heard the result of the examination? Dr. Awdrey *did* murder Flexmore."

"Then why is he at large?" I asked. "Why has no warrant for his arrest been issued?"

They could only shrug their shoulders; but I could explain the matter to them—*Flexmore was not murdered at all.* The arsenic was found in his mouth, it had not touched the digestive apparatus, and for this reason: it had been administered after the life had left his body. This was the report made by the authorized doctors who made the examination.

Upon this report no one could be accused of murder legally, nor at the present juncture could a charge of attempt to murder be instituted. That the poison had not been given in the form of a potion, such as Miss Dalrymple had been charged by Dr. Awdrey to administer, was clear from the fact that it was found in the form of a powder, and must have been dropped into my old friend's mouth when his jaw dropped after death. Still, it had clearly been given with a view to destroying life should he recover his vital faculties; and it was equally evident to the majority of people that Awdrey, who knew the contents of the will to be signed, alone was presumably desirous of preventing a return to life, for only a very small minority knew that Lynn Yeames also had a strong reason for making death sure at that time.

Now, though there was no evidence to commit Awdrey for attempt to murder, circumstances were sufficiently suspicious to enable the Yeames party to contest the will. But I had still stronger reasons than that for getting at the truth of the matter, and fixing the guilt on the guilty. Even the paupers would refuse to take medicine from the hand of a reputed murderer; but over and above all other considerations was the peace and happiness of my friends. Miss Dalrymple's words rung out clearly in my memory, "he will not ask me to be his wife."

I went to work at once, and determined to take no rest until I had secured the safety of poor Awdrey and Nurse Gertrude. My clerk was a sharp, dependable young fellow.

"Now, Mr. Jones," said I, "I am going to put you on your mettle."

"Glad of it, Mr. Keene," he replied eagerly. "Is it this poisoning case, sir?"

"Yes, it is. Bax, Yeames's agent, says they can produce the man who threw me out of the gig, and prove that he was engaged to do it by Dr. Awdrey."

"I understand, sir. I know Mr. Bax by sight, and Mr. Yeames too."

"Yes; well, now, you must find their witness. In all probability that trick was unpremeditated. It was suggested to him by circumstances, by a chance meeting with the fellow who stretched that rope. Who might that be? It was just such a day as a poacher would like for wiring hares. Yeames had been doing a good deal of shooting. A poacher can be more useful than a keeper to a gentleman on the look-out for game. A man of that kind was the very one to suit his purpose. And a man who would do a job of that kind could be easily bribed to swear he was employed by Dr. Awdrey. That man must be found. Now, then, how are you going about it?"

"First of all," said Jones, after a little thought, "I'll find out if any one has been spending money freely in the beer shops up at Bagley; or whether any one is away—because I should think Bax would get him out of sight. But he must have a wife or relatives about, and the neighbours are sure to be jealous. May I tempt them to speak with a little cash, sir?"

"As much as you need. Don't spare it. If Bax has given twenty pounds to get a lie, we will give fifty to have the truth. I see you know your

business—go at it at once. If you bring that man here in a week, you shall have a month's holiday and a rise of ten pounds. There's money—now off you go."

He was hardly out of the house before Miss Dalrymple came in.

"What are you going to do for Dr. Awdrey?" was the first question she asked.

"I am going to prove his innocence, please God," I said.

"Tell me how," she said, in a tone of entreaty, laying her hand on my arm.

"Well, that is difficult to say. There's so much to do that I scarcely know where to begin."

"If there is much to do, let me help. Tell me what I may do."

"That is still more difficult," I said, scratching my ear. "This sort of work is scarcely suited to you, I am afraid."

"Why not? I have a woman's wit, and I don't mind *what* I do. I *can't* rest idle. Only tell me what difficulty there is to overcome, and trust my intelligence."

"There's one thing you can attempt, at any rate,"

I said; "the rascal employed by Yeames, Bax, signified that they had a witness in reserve to prove a criminal charge against Awdrey. That means they have got hold of some one to swear to his administering the arsenic. Now that some one must be of this place. If you can find out who it is, and let me know, I may persuade that witness to stand on the side of truth."

"I understand you. I will try," she said, but with a wandering look, as though she were seeking the means to penetrate such a mystery.

"It is an almost impossible task, I know," said I; "but your sex can talk so fast, and get to the point so adroitly, that I fancy you have as much chance of succeeding as I have. Now I must go off and see Awdrey."

"I should like to go with you," she said timidly, yet with earnestness.

I showed her that it would be better not to go at this moment.

"Tell him that—that I sympathize with him, Mr. Keene," she said tenderly.

"You may be sure of that," said I, pressing her hand.

We parted at the door, she going one way, I the other.

"Awdrey," said I, when I met him, "Miss Dalrymple sympathizes with you."

"I am certain of that," he replied.

"Yes: and you may be sure of something else. If we get this affair settled rightly, you may be the happiest man in the world, or it will be your own fault."

"What," said he eagerly, "do you think her feeling is deeper than sympathy?"

"I am sure of it, that's more!" I exclaimed.

"Notwithstanding the doubt that hangs over me—the feeling against me?"

"There's no doubt in that generous soul," I said; "and as for the feeling against you, it's just the thing to endear you to her. Did you ever know the woman who would not side with a man in misfortune, who wouldn't love him the dearer for his having none to love him but herself? Here, let's get to work."

I pulled out my note-book and, pointing my pencil, said—"Now, you have to tax your memory to the utmost. Your happiness depends as much upon a clear recollection as anything. I must have

an account of every minute of the day that Flexmore died."

Then carefully we went over the events of that day to the minutest particular, from the hour of his rising until he went again to bed.

What I learnt will appear duly in its place.

It was a long job, necessitating much discussion and verification, but we stuck at it until it was done, then we ate and drank and made as merry as we could. It was no effort to Awdrey; I had never seen him in such high spirits. It was as if ten years of hard work and disappointment had been taken off his shoulders. Only now and then his face assumed its old gravity as the thought perhaps occurred to him that if he failed to prove his innocence he must slip back again into the Slough of Despond.

It was past five when I got back to my office. To my utter astonishment I found Miss Dalrymple waiting there for me, and with her a woman.

Miss Dalrymple rose and met me with forced calm, but I could see that her face was flushed with triumph, and her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"I have brought Mrs. Bates to see you, said she,"

"'I HAVE BROUGHT MRS. BATES TO SEE YOU,' SAID SHE."

"or rather Mrs. Bates asked to see you. She desires to make a full communication of all she knows."

I bowed to Mrs. Bates, who sat rigidly in her chair. She was a middle-aged person with a face like a hatchet, and a body like the handle of it. A hard, cold, long woman of the scraggy kind, and just dull enough to think herself sharp.

"I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Bates," said I, turning up the lamp. "Why, surely I have met you before?"

"I were in Dr. Hawdrey's hemploy," she replied.

I shall not trouble to reproduce all her superfluous h's, but be it understood she aspirated every vowel.

"To be sure. Now I remember you. So you have something to tell me, have you?"

"I wish to conceal nothink, for I have nothink to conceal," she said.

"Mrs. Bates has received a visit from Mr. Bax," said Miss Dalrymple, with a feminine suavity that I could not too much admire; "and she was equally candid and outspoken with him. Were you not?"

"I were miss. I do not wish to sell myself,

though untold gold were offered. I am an honest woman, and no one has ever righteously accused me otherways."

"Surely Mr. Bax has not been attempting to bribe you, ma'am?" I said, in a tone of indignation. "No one who knows you would try to tamper with your integrity by suggesting payment for information. To offer a recompense—a suitable recompense—for services rendered would be a different thing, but before—tut, tut, tut!"

I knew the woman. She was one of those who are continually fancying themselves suspected; if they find a lost halfpenny or a stray stick of sealing-wax they will think it is laid out to "tempt them," and I will add that women of this kind are the most to be suspected.

"I told Mr. Bax why I left Dr. Awdrey, as I have told others," said Mrs. Bates; "and am not ashamed of owning to it before the Queen herself. And nothing shall make me leave Coneyford, where I am not ashamed to show my face any day in the week."

"Of course he would have been very glad to get you out of the way as if you were a criminal?"

"But I were not going. Dr. Awdrey cannot deny that I gave him warning."

"And why did you give him warning?" I asked, seeing that the point lay there.

"Because he unrighteously accused me of meddling with his bottles, which I will take my oath I never touched. The bottle of harsenic layed there marked on the floor. I will not say that Mr. Bax is not right in saying that the doctor let it slip from his guilty hand himself, and wished to put it on me in case of inquiries. I know that he ast me over and over again to stop after I gave warning, and offered a rise in my celery, sayin' it must be the cat as knocked the bottle down. But I see the trap that was laid for me, and would not stay, which is a mercy, I'm sure, or I might now be in the condemned cell."

She rambled on a long while to the same purpose, while I made notes of certain facts, and from time to time exasperated her to further rambling; but when she had repeated all her facts half a dozen times, and I saw there was no more to be got out of her, I rose and said—"That is enough for the present, ma'am; but I have no doubt you will repeat all you have said to-day if you are asked to do so."

She glorified her own steadfastness and sense of rectitude, and so went away.

Miss Dalrymple had sunk into a chair, and met my gaze with a look of dejection. She was evidently disappointed that I had not persuaded Mrs. Bates from her adverse opinion.

"I am afraid my witness will do us more harm than good. This broken bottle adds to the weight of evidence against Dr. Awdrey."

"My dear girl," said I, taking her hand between both of mine, "that woman's evidence is worth a Jew's eye to us. You have done us an incalculable benefit in bringing her here."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE INQUIRY.

I WAS not astonished the next morning when my housekeeper brought me Mr. Bax's card.

"Introduce Mr. Bax at once," said I, in a voice that he might hear.

Mr. Bax puffed his way into the office like an unsound locomotive, and I gave him my hand with a smile. He winked significantly, and stretched out his legs when he seated himself, feeling that he was master of the situation.

"Not quite so much virtuous indignation about, Keene, eh?"

"*Tempora mutantur*, you know, Mr. Bax; *et nos mutamur in illis*," said I blandly. There's nothing flatters an ignorant man so pleasantly as to imply a belief in his learning.

"Just so; I know all about that," he said. "Well, now then, what are we going to do about this affair?"

"Of course we are innocent," I said.

"You've got to prove that."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, is your client willing to hand over the trust-money, or—going to fight it?"

"I should not advise him to go to law."

"No," he grunted, with a nod. "Very wise, too."

"A lawsuit would drain the estate; at the same time we have the money, and possession is nine points of the law."

"The greater reason—knock the matter off at once. You propose compromise, I suppose, eh? Good job for Awdrey—got a generous man to deal with. Any one else but Lynn would have the lot. Awdrey wants a third or something like that, eh?"

"Dr. Awdrey wants as much as he can get—reasonably. But, before I can suggest any compromise on his part, we must prove his innocence. You understand my position. I cannot run the risk of being accused of collusion."

"Prove his innocence—how do you propose to do that?"

"I suggest that we hold a meeting in this office of all the parties concerned, and invite the attendance of some well-known person—a justice of the peace say—to give the inquiry publicity, and make a thorough examination of the affair from beginning to end. I shall try to prove my client's innocence to the satisfaction of the magistrate. If I fail, so much the worse for us; if I succeed, I shall be very willing to listen to any terms you may propose."

"And reject 'em," grunted Bax; and then, looking extremely sly, he pursued, "I'm as deep as you, Keene. You don't catch me in a trap. If you get the magistrate and public opinion on your side, you'll be as saucy as you were the other day."

"I sha'n't be a fool, Mr. Bax. You can withhold your decision as to your final course until you have made terms with me: it is always open to you after this examination—which, as I have shown you, is but a proper safeguard of my own reputation—to contest the will, and take public proceedings. All I demand is a full examination, and some public recognition

of Dr. Awdrey's innocence, before I attempt any pecuniary accommodation with you."

"We withhold our decision after the examination until terms are made with you," mused Bax, with his finger on his nose and his eye on the ceiling. "Well, I don't see much objection to the meeting in that case. But the poison in the man's mouth—how are you going to explain that?"

"I may be able to prove," said I, after a show of hesitation, "that Flexmore feared untimely burial, and left instructions for means to be taken after death to prevent resuscitation. I may be able to produce his written wish to that effect."

"By George, that's a clever notion!" exclaimed Bax, gasping approval. "Was it the doctor's idea, or yours?"

"Oh, let me impress upon you at once," said I, "that the doctor pleads not guilty to everything, and will take no measures whatever to clear himself from suspicion."

"He does very well—follow your instructions—leave his case in such able hands—compliments, Keene." He waved his gloves towards me. "Of course you don't want us to produce our witnesses—keep them out of the way."

"On the contrary, I shall call Mrs. Bates."

"Oh, you've found her out, eh? Hard nut she is. Any way, you won't want the fellows Awdrey engaged—fellows who tripped you up, I mean."

"We won't bother ourselves about them," said I.

He rose.

"Well, I'll talk it over with the Yeameses, and if they don't object—no reason why we shouldn't fall in with your plan."

We shook hands and parted with mutual hypocrisy, and I got my hat in order to seek the magistrate whom I had fixed on in my thoughts for the service I needed. I felt certain the examination would be agreed to; for, though it might be a ticklish business for Yeames, it was not half so hazardous as opening a lawsuit. He had not the money for such a venture, to begin with, and I knew that Bax would lead him to suppose the inquiry in my office was a mere farce to make me clear in the opinion of my clients; and that, however it ended, he could be no worse off than in the beginning.

By the time Bax was out of sight, I went off to the Manor House to see Sir Roland Firkin, J.P.

Sir Roland was one of the best known and most popular men in the county; and he deserved to be, for he was a thoroughly kind-hearted and generous old fellow, willing at all times to render a service, and not too stupid to despise advice. He had a reputation for sapience in his magisterial capacity, due to his abiding implicitly by the direction of his clerk, and his decisions on questions of justice were regarded as final. It was only natural that he should to a certain degree share the general opinion with regard to his legal acumen, and I knew very well that the old gentleman itched to dispense with counsel of the court clerk, and prove, to himself at least, that he could form a sound decision and follow it up with necessary action independently.

I laid the case before him, and asked if he would consent to preside at an informal inquiry should the Yeames side accept our proposal of going thoroughly into the truth of what may be called the Flexmore poisoning case. He gave me his promise to attend without hesitation, and approved highly of the course I had taken for making the inquiry public, promising that reparation should be made to Awdrey on the part

of his friends and himself should it be found that the charge against him was unjust.

The next day Bax called upon me to say that Lynn and his mother agreed to attend the inquiry, and I fixed it for the following afternoon at three o'clock; for, as luck would have it, I had received just half an hour before a telegram from my clerk, saying that he had found two men who acknowledged to stretching the rope, and had agreed to tell the whole truth concerning the affair. The despatch came from London, and I reckoned upon these witnesses arriving by the morning train which reaches Coneyford at 10.30.

In the evening I went to my friends, and I also called upon Mrs. Bates, binding them all to be in my office at the hour fixed; then I went home and spent the best part of the night in drawing up the questions to be put, for I determined that Sir Roland Firkin should be the chief actor in the inquiry, not only because it would please the old gentleman, but because the question would wear less of an *ex parte* aspect coming from him.

The next morning I had my office table pushed up in a corner, and a long dining-table brought in covered

with green baize ; all my ink-pots were brought into requisition and a sheet of paper laid before each chair, and the regulation water-bottle and tumbler placed at the head of the table for the president to dip into if the proceedings grew dry.

One thing vexed me. My clerk did not arrive with the witnesses by the 10.30 train ; however a telegram came to say that they would travel by the next down train, which reaches Coneyford at 2.15.

At 2 p.m. I had lunched and dressed, and was looking at my watch anxiously.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BROUGHT TO BOOK.

DR. AWDREY and Miss Dalrymple were the first to arrive: they came together—Awdrey with a bright and cheerful smile on his face, and perfectly calm; Miss Dalrymple showing symptoms of nervousness, but staunch and true for all that.

Next came Sir Roland Firkin; we had a private chat in my dining-room, and I put the list of questions in his hand, instructing him as tenderly as I could how to conduct the inquiry. He was mightily pleased with his own importance.

Then Mr. Bax and Mrs. Yeames arrived: Mr. Bax puffed and gasped, bowing to one and then the other with the solemnity of an undertaker; Mrs. Yeames passed to her seat, after a low obeisance to Sir Roland, without recognizing Dr. Awdrey and Miss Dalrymple, except by drawing down her lips and contracting

her nostrils as she might in passing an unsavory dustheap.

As the clock struck three Mrs. Bates, who had been waiting outside, gave a single bang at the door and was introduced: her courtesy to Sir Roland and her rigidity in sitting down, together with her air of conscious virtue, gave her a strong resemblance to Mrs. Yeames—for the reason perhaps that their airs sprang in both cases from a narrowness and vulgarity of mind.

Lynn Yeames came in two minutes later, panting with the haste he had made, and beaming all over with that frank, manly, generous smile of his. He looked round the room, saw Awdrey standing beside Miss Dalrymple, and strode up to him, head erect, shoulders back, and his hand out, as if to say before us all—"I do not share this common ill-opinion of my old friend."

Dr. Awdrey stood perfectly still, and looked straight in Lynn's face without moving a muscle, letting him stand there with his extended hand untaken. With a sigh and a shrug Lynn dropped his hand and turned away. This was a little *coup de théâtre.*

Mr. Bax approached the table, put his knuckles on it, and, after bowing to Sir Roland Firkin, said impressively—"I was given to understand—this was to be an amicable inquiry. The hostile attitude of Dr. Awdrey towards my friend, Mr. Lynn Yeames——"

"You overlook the fact, Mr. Bax," said I, knuckling the table on the other side, "that the onus of administering arsenic to Mr. Flexmore falls upon one of three people—Dr. Awdrey, Mr. Yeames, and Miss Dalrymple. You cannot expect Dr. Awdrey, by taking the hand of Mr. Yeames, to imply his belief in the guilt of Miss Dalrymple."

"A very nice distinction, Mr. Keene," said Sir Roland, "which I think you, Mr. Yeames, must have overlooked."

This was one to us.

"Now we will proceed to business," said Sir Roland, taking the chair at the head of the table.

Mr. Bax, Mrs. Yeames, and Lynn sat on the left-hand side of the table; Miss Dalrymple, Dr. Awdrey, and I, faced them on the right. Mrs. Bates sat at a little distance from the table; a shorthand clerk I

had engaged for this occasion sat at the desk in the corner.

Sir Roland began with a nice little speech of course, which included a well-chosen verse from Shakespeare, and concluded with an earnest wish that every one might be found perfectly innocent of the shocking charge which had been brought forward. He then poured out a glass of water, took a sip, settled his glasses firmly on his nose, and, taking up my sheet of questions, said—"Miss Gertrude Dalrymple, you remember the day of Mr. George Flexmore's death?"

"Perfectly well," she replied.

"What hour was it when you first saw him that day?"

"About eight o'clock in the morning."

"Was he alone at that time?"

"No. Dr. Awdrey was sitting beside him."

"He had been watching at Mr. Flexmore's bedside all night, I believe?"

"Yes; he insisted the previous night on taking my place and giving me rest."

"How long did you stay in the room?"

"Only a few minutes—merely the time to learn

that he was better. I saw that I had interrupted a conversation, and that Mr. Flexmore wished to be alone with Dr. Awdrey."

"How long did that conversation continue after your departure?"

"About half an hour. Dr. Awdrey then called me back, and gave me instructions with regard to the treatment of Mr. Flexmore and the medicine to be given."

"Was the medicine in the form of a liquid or a powder?"

"A liquid. It was a sedative draught, I believe."

"Had you to administer a powder?"

"No."

"Did you see any powder in the room?"

"No."

"What happened after Dr. Awdrey's departure?"

"Nothing until Mr. Keene arrived. Mr. Flexmore then asked me to leave the room, as he had business to talk over, and I went down stairs."

"When Mr. Keene left, you returned to the room?"

"Yes."

"What hour was that?"

"About half-past eleven."

"Did any one call soon after?"

"Yes; Mr. Lynn Yeames—almost immediately after."

"Did he see Mr. Flexmore then?"

"No. He saw me, and I told him of the serious condition of Mr. Flexmore."

"Did he ask any questions?"

"He was very anxious to learn what Mr. Keene had been saying to him. I could give him no satisfaction on this point, and he went away."

"He was absent some time, and then returned?"

"Yes; about half-past one. He came into the room and asked me to leave as he had something to say to Mr. Flexmore. I hesitated, for Mr. Flexmore was less easy, and I warned Mr. Yeames that it would be dangerous to excite him. He promised to be careful, and I withdrew."

"How long were you absent?"

"Only a few minutes. I heard Mr. Yeames speaking in a high and angry tone, and I knew that could do Mr. Flexmore no good. Mr. Yeames went out of the house slamming the door behind him, and I found the patient much worse."

"You attribute that to the behaviour of Mr.

Yeames?" said Sir Roland, straying from his notes.

Mr. Bax interfered at once: he could not allow witness to be led to suppose anything.

Sir Roland sipped water, and returned to his notes.

"When did you again see Mr. Yeames?"

"About half-past three."

"In what condition was Mr. Flexmore then?"

"Dying; he was unconscious when Mr. Yeames entered the room."

"What followed?"

"Shortly after Mr. Yeames came in Mr. Flexmore died. When I was sure he was no more I left the room, taking Miss Flexmore down stairs."

"Did Mr. Yeames accompany you?"

"No; he remained in the room."

"What was he doing when you left him?"

"He was standing at the window, looking out."

"Was there anything peculiar in his manner?"

"He seemed utterly unconscious when I spoke to him. I spoke twice, and he made no reply—no movement whatever."

"What else occurred to your recollection?"

"Laure, Miss Flexmore, was overcome with grief. While I was attempting to console her, I heard Mr. Keene in the hall; he went up stairs. After a little while he came down with Mr. Yeames: they both came into the sitting-room where I was with Miss Flexmore."

"Did Mr. Yeames—er—still seem ill at ease, may I ask?" said Sir Roland, laying down his paper for an instant.

"I do not think you *may* ask that," said Mr. Bax.

Sir Roland bowed, took another sip, and resumed questioning from the notes.

"How long did Mr. Keene stay with you?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Was Mr. Yeames in the room all the time?"

"No; he went out of the room, but not out of the house, before Mr. Keene left."

"Did anything occur to make him leave the room?"

"He seemed to have lost something. He felt repeatedly in his pockets, and looked about the floor.

"Did he continue his search after leaving the room?"

"Yes; he had a candle, and looked all up the stairs and in the hall."

"Do you know what it was he had lost?"

"A piece of paper. He said there was an important memorandum on it, and he offered to give the maid half a sovereign if she found it."

I glanced at Mr. Yeames, so did Sir Roland, whom I touched with my toe under the table. The young man was looking at the white paper before him, and there was scarcely more colour in his face. He looked up in quick dread at the next question.

"Was that paper found?"

"No."

Mr. Yeames drew a long breath of relief.

"Have you anything to ask Miss Dalrymple, Mr. Keene?"

I replied "No;" and he put the same question to Mr. Bax, who equally declined to put any questions.

"I shall now ask you, Mr. Lynn Yeames, to give me your attention. You do not dispute the order of events as stated by Miss Dalrymple?"

"No."

"When you left Flexmore House, at half-past eleven, you rode over to Mr. Keene?"

"Yes."

"You had seen him leave the house, and were acutely anxious to know what his business there was?"

Lynn hesitated a moment, but at a nudge from Bax replied: "Yes."

"You had been given to understand that the bulk of Mr. Flexmore's property would be left in trust to you?"

"Yes," after another nudge.

"The presence of Mr. Keene led you to think that Mr. Flexmore might have altered his disposition?"

Nudge as before, and "Yes."

"On arriving at Mr. Keene's you were shown into the office, and waited there some time alone?"

"Yes."

"You saw a sheet of foolscap lying on the table?"

A particular snort from Mr. Bax, whereupon Yeames replied that he had seen nothing of the kind whatever.

"You are sure of that?" asked Sir Roland.

"I will take my oath I saw nothing of the kind."

"When you left Flexmore House the second time, about half-past one, where did you go?"

"To fetch Dr. Awdrey."

"Dr. Awdrey was not at home, I believe?"

"He was not. I waited for him half an hour, or thereabouts."

"Where did you wait?"

"In his private sitting-room."

"You know that the consulting-room adjoins the sitting-room?"

A nudge—"Yes."

"Did you go in there for any purpose?"

A sniff from Mr. Bax—"No."

"After waiting quietly in the sitting-room half an hour, you returned to Flexmore House?"

"Yes; I was anxious about Mr. Flexmore's condition."

"With respect to the piece of paper you mislaid; have you any objection to stating what it was?"

'None; it was a leaf from my note-book, con-

taining memoranda respecting horses I had backed for a spring meeting."

Here Sir Roland again asked if we had any questions to ask, and, on receiving a reply in the negative, he proceeded to question Mrs. Bates.

"You were in the service of Dr. Awdrey, I believe, at the time of Mr. Flexmore's death?"

"I were, sir."

"The previous night Dr. Awdrey was absent from home?"

"He were, sir. He came in about half-past ten or eleven the next morning, I will not swear exact, and he ast for breakfast—which tea and a rasher of bacon I gave him."

"After that he went out?"

"He did: about twelve or half-past, I will not swear."

"You had tidied up his room in the morning as usual?"

"I had; about seven or half-past. I will not——"

"You are not asked to swear, Mrs. Bates. Now in tidying up his room, had you occasion to go into the consulting-room?"

"I never ventured there, sir; though I may be disbelieved."

"When Mr. Yeames called, you showed him into the sitting-room?"

"I did; him being a friend, as I was led to believe, of Dr. Hawdrey's."

"During the half hour he was there did you hear any particular sound?"

"An 'awker were crying s'rimps——"

"I mean in the room where—er—Mr. Yeames was sitting?"

"No, sir, I did not; being at my dooties hup stairs."

"Nothing like the crash of a falling bottle?"

"Nothink of the kind."

"The door communicating with the consulting-room was open?"

"No; it were closed, though the key turned."

"But the key was in?"

"It were."

"There was nothing, in fact, to prevent Mr. Yeames strolling in there from curiosity—to while away the time that he was waiting for Dr. Awdrey?"

"Nothink; but I believe Mr. Yeames were too much the gentleman to go a-prying and a-peering."

She had evidently a gratuity in view, that Mrs. Bates.

"When did you first hear of a bottle being broken?"

"When Dr. Awdrey came in; about four o'clock or half-past. He asked me if I had done it, and I said I had not; and should feel obliged if he would find some one else, as I did not like such things to be laid to me."

"Did he make any other remark about the consulting room? Was anything missing from there?"

"Yes; he said a prescription was gone."

"Did he describe the prescription?"

"Yes; he said it were written on the bottle papers."

"What do you mean by the bottle papers?"

"A pile of square papers, white, as stood on the little side counter."

"Can you show me what the papers were like?"

"Exactly like that sheet on the table," pointing to a sheet of thin white paper which I had purposely laid on the table near where she was to sit. "Dr.

Hawdrey tried to pass it off afterwards," Mrs. Bates volunteered; "he said it must have been the shaking of carts passing, or the cat, and offered to rise my celery if I would stay. But I refused, seein' it were not the first time he had laid temptation in my way—giving me half-a-crown to buy a four-penny arrand, and not askin' for the change till two days afterwards—which I kept it back to prove him."

"That is enough. Dr. Awdrey, I shall confine my questions to events connected with the latter part of the evidence. Tell me, if you please, what you know about the broken bottle of arsenic."

"It was a blue bottle, labelled in large letters 'Arsenic: poison.' On going into the consulting-room I found it in fragments on the floor, with the powder widely scattered."

"How did you account for its being there?"

"I believed that Mrs. Bates had taken it down from the shelf on which it stood, and that it had slipped from her fingers in putting it back."

"It is false, Dr. Hawdrey!" exclaimed Mrs. Bates.

Mrs. Yeames nodded approval.

"Hush, Mrs. Bates, if you please. Did it not

occur to you, Dr. Awdrey, that the same motive of curiosity might have influenced Mr. Yeames while he was waiting, and that the accident arose in that way?"

"No. It never entered my imagination that he would do such a thing. Had it been suggested to me I would not have believed it, sharing as I did Mrs. Bates's opinion of his gentlemanly delicacy."

"You attributed the accident to accidental cause?"

"Not entirely. I believed that some one had been in the room."

"Why?"

"Because of the missing prescription."

"Tell me about this prescription."

"It was a prescription, jotted down with a lead pencil on the pile of paper referred to, that I intended to make up later on."

"It is your habit to make notes on this pile of paper?"

"It is."

"Have you ever been able to trace that missing prescription?"

"No; I have never discovered any trace of it."

Here the note under Sir Roland's hand ran—"Look to me." Sir Roland looked at me, and taking a folded sheet of brown paper from under my notes, I opened it, and handing a sheet of the bottle paper to Dr. Awdrey, I said—"Is that the prescription, Dr. Awdrey?"

I never saw a man so astonished in my life.

"Good heavens, yes!" he exclaimed. "Where did you find it?"

"You will hear presently," said I, fixing my eyes on Lynn Yeames.

Every one at the table looked at him, seeing my eyes so fixed; and, though he continued to meet our gaze, his blanched cheek told the terror he felt.

I carefully handed the sheet of paper to Sir Roland.

"Why, my gracious, what does this mean?" he asked, looking from one to the other; then, catching a significant glance from me, he took up his notes again quietly. "Mr. Keene," he said, "tell me what took place on the occasion of Mr. Yeames's visit on the day of Mr. Flexmore's death."

"I was taking lunch when he called," said I, "in the next room, before sitting down to make out the will in accordance with Mr. Flexmore's wishes. He

had been induced to make the alteration through Dr. Awdrey."

"Dr. Awdrey wished the will leaving property to him to be revoked?" exclaimed Sir Roland.

"He did," said I; and I explained Awdrey's reasons, and all about it fully. Then I continued—

"In the new will the name of Lynn Yeames was to be substituted for Dr. Awdrey's. I had the draft of the first will, and intending to copy it after lunch, had imprudently left it on the table in this room. Mr. Yeames came in here; I was in the next room. You see the blind to the half-glazed door. It is opaque from this point of view; it is transparent from the other side. Standing by the door before entering, I saw Lynn Yeames reading the draft of Mr. Flexmore's first will. He was at once led to conclude that this was the second will commanded by Flexmore."

Here Bax protested.

"I appeal to you, sir," said I to Sir Roland, "to say whether my statement is in order or not."

"You are perfectly in order, sir; go on," said Sir Roland Firkin, highly gratified by this appeal to his ruling.

I was not in order, but he knew no better.

"With the belief that I was making out a will which would beggar him, he went away, and you can see that he had the strongest inducement to delay me and prevent Mr. Flexmore signing a second will."

"Sir Roland Firkin," gasped Mr. Bax, "I protest most——"

"Silence, if you please," said Sir Roland; "I rule that Mr. Keene is perfectly in order. Go on, sir."

"After seeing my old friend lying in his bedroom above, dead, I went down stairs with Lynn Yeames, as you have heard. There, in a moment of impatience, he flicked his handkerchief from his pocket, and in doing so shot out a pellet of paper. I put my foot on that pellet of paper, and when Yeames left the room to look for it I put it in my pocket."

"Quite right, too, Mr. Keene; go on," said Sir Roland in great excitement.

"I put it away in a drawer where I keep things which may at some time be of service, and forgot all about it until my suspicion was directed to Yeames by the discovery that the very day he lost it he

bolted out of England and did not return until Mr. Flexmore was buried, and all fear of the poison being found out and traced to him was removed. Then I recalled to mind the paper pellet—the sheet of paper you have now under your hand, Sir Roland."

"We will not stay here to be insulted!" cried Mrs. Yeames, rising: "it is scandalous. But we will obtain redress."

"I should think so," gasped Bax. "Pretty pitfall —'pon my life!"

But at this moment, as all of their party were rising, the door opened, and the entry was blocked by my clerk with a couple of rascals whom I knew well enough by sight.

"We're a goin' Queen's evidence, guv'nor," said the smartest of the two, with a grin at Yeames.

"Out with it my man, at once," said I.

"Well, sir, and gentlemen all, it was like this here—me and my mate was going along with a rope to do a bit of hauling for Squire Long when we tumbled again Mr. Yeames. My mate had suthing to say about shooting. Suddenly Mr. Yeames, who

hadn't been listening like, said he'd give us a pound if we'd play a lark on you, Mr. Keene——"

"'WE'RE A-GOIN' QUEEN'S EVIDENCE.'"

"Sir," said I to Sir Roland, seeing Yeames, his mother, and Bax edging towards the door, "on this

evidence I ask you to commit Lynn Yeames for conspiracy."

"Ay, I'll commit the whole batch, and you, Mrs. Bates, as well. Send for my clerk, and the papers."

But we could not detain any one of the batch while the commitments were being procured, and so Lynn, his mother, and Bax got clear off. And, thank heaven, we have neither seen nor heard anything of them since—which is the best thing that could have happened for them and for us.

* * * * *

What is there to add? Nothing but what should conclude a tale of struggle between right and wrong.

Dr. Awdrey married Gertrude, and lost no time over it—I believe as he took her hand in his, when his innocence and perfect freedom was proved, and they looked into each other's eyes dimmed with the tear of joy, it was understood between them that hand and heart were joined for ever.

They live with Laure in the pretty cottage on the hill. Awdrey gave up his practice and went heart and soul into farming, and when he found the land

could be worked to pecuniary advantage he bought it out, divided it into portions, and let it to the men who had laboured upon it—thus making them independent. I feared the scheme would not pay, but it has to a marvellous extent, thanks to Awdrey's wise and practical counsel to his tenants. Yet, though he has given up practice, there's not a day in the week but some one calls to benefit by his skill in medicine.

Laure is now verging on womanhood, and a good many young fellows in Coneyford wedge themselves into the circle of acquaintances with which Dr. Awdrey and his wife are surrounded for her sake. I have my eye on one who I think may be found worthy of her hand. Laure pretends, with a blush, that she does not want to marry, and would rather stay for ever with Gertrude and her children. One fine day she will pretend that her heart will break if she cannot marry.

The Awdreys have three boys, and fine sturdy fellows they are.

"They make me feel that I am getting older," said Gertrude.

"And so much the happier," I replied.

It seems to me that Awdrey himself is positively younger for the lapse of time. I never knew a man

"IT IS A TREAT TO SEE HIM WITH HIS BOYS."

more cheerful and bright. It is a treat to see him with his boys in the shed he has fitted up as a

carpenter's workshop. Whether he intends putting them to a profession one of these days, I don't know; but it is certain that every one of them will be a good carpenter, which is something. But what most pleases me is to see him with his wife. Sure no young lover, no knight of old, could be more chivalrous; no gentleman of to-day more generous!

THE END.

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